Food poisoning hits hundreds in Japan

OSAKA. June 30: Hundreds of people in Japan's western Kansai region were showing signs of food poisoning today after drinking milk from the country's biggest dairy product naker, government officials said, reports Reuters.

As of 11 am (0200 GMT), 826 people were showing food poisoning symptoms including vomiting, diarrhoea and stomach aches after drinking milk made by Snow Brand Milk Products Co Ltd, Osaka city and prefecture officials said. That was up from 307 people

at 9 am, they added. The cases were contained to the Kansai region which includes Osaka city, Kyoto, Nara, Hyogo and Wakayama prefec-

"People showing food poisoning symptoms totalled 567 in Osaka prefecture as of 11:00 am," an official of Osaka prefecture government said.

Snow Brand, Japan's biggest dairy product maker, said it started to recall 300,000 packs of low-fat milk yesterday.

"We have no idea on what caused this (food poisoning). We are now working to find out details of the case and to estimate possible loss," the spokesman

Caltiger.com of India to get overseas listing

NEW DELHI, June 30: India's first free Internet service provider Caltiger.com will get a full member looked distant. an overseas listing in October by raising 100 million dollars abroad, the company chairman Joe Silva said yesterday, reports AFP.

"We plan to come out with an of Mercosur's \$1 trillion econinitial public offering (IPO) worth 100 million dollars between October 15 and 30. We plan to list on the US Nasdaq Exchange or the London Stock Exchange," Silva told a press conference.

Silva said the issue would fund a 10,000-kilometre (6,200mile) optic fibre network which would serve as the backbone for large e-commerce operations and free access to the Internet in 100 Indian cities.

The company's aggressive marketing has helped it increase its subscriber base to 200,000 from 14,000 on March 25, when it started offering free internet access.

Silva said the firm's gamble of providing free Internet access had paid off, attracting hundreds of advertisers and makits operations profitable since last month.

He said advertisements on its portal fetched the firm 10 million rupees (0.23 million dollars) last month. "Our subscriber base is growing at an exponential rate and we hope to reach the one-million mark by the end of the year," Silva said

in a company statement. "This fiscal year, on the lower side, we expect a profit of 200 million rupees."

8th board meet of Islami Insurance held

The 8 meeting of the Board of Directors of Islami Insurance Bangladesh Limited was held at a city hotel recently.

The meeting was presided over by the chairman of the company and was attended by all the board members including its managing directors, says a press release.

The meeting reviewed the overall performance of the company and expressed satisfaction over the progress achieved so far. It also evaluated different expansion programmes so as to reach the benefit of Islami Insurance to the country's business community.

Microsoft, Jupiter to merge cable interests in Japan

WASHINGTON, June 30: Microsoft and Jupiter Telecommunications of the United States are about to announce the merger of their cable operations in Japan in a deal that would create the largest Japanese cable enterprise, the Financial Times reported yesterday in its online edition, says

FT.com said John Malone of Liberty Media and Microsoft veil the transaction today.

The report said the combination of Jupiter Telecommunications, equally owned by Liberty Media and Sumitomo of Japan, with Titus Communications, 80 per cent controlled by Microsoft, would produce a cable provider with across to a potential market of seven million

would be owned 35 per cent by poverty. Liberty, 35 per cent by Sumitand three per cent each by Japanese groups Itochn and

Toshiba, according to FT.com. initial public offering of the combined company, valued at about five billion dollars, the report said.

is only seven per cent in Japan. compared with 68 per cent in family of three.

the United States. But it cited reports of robust Japanese demand for cable services.

Pakistan keen to increase trade with rival India

lion of Mercosur's 210 million private that they are much

could join a bloc that protects country per head in Latin

its industries from imports America, but its population of

from outside Mercosur with tar- 36 million is dwarfed by

iffs that range from about 10 Brazil's 160 million, and Brazil

"There is a disagreement on on big Mercosur decisions.

Chilean Foreign Minister than their counterparts in

ISLAMABAD, June 30: Pakistan's military-led government said Thursday that it wants to increase trade with ri- stricted. val India, reports AP.

"Pakistan doesn't have any objections in promoting trade news conference.

Pakistan is "actively considbetween the two nations, he last year.

BUENOS AIRES, June 30:

South America's Mercosur be-

gan a meeting yesterday to gen-

erate new momentum for the

world's third-largest trade bloc

after a tough year, but the

prospect of bringing in Chile as

Brazil and Argentina, South

America's two largest

count for more than 95 per cent

omy, want to patch up dis-

agreements that flared after

Brazil's devaluation in January

"relaunch" Mercosur, which

some feared could be near col-

lapse last year. But one of the

new momentum - incorporat-

Chilean economy as a full

member - looks set to go

nowhere because of disagree-

Mercosur also includes

Paraguay, which is poor and

plagued by political instability

and corruption, and Uruguay,

ments over tariff levels.

hotel recently.

key measures designed to bring

ing the small but vigorous

They are now pushing to

economies, which together ac-

says Reuters.

but because of the strained rela- tions." he said. tions over the disputed region of Kashmir, trading has been re- comment from India.

Kashmir and the dispute has been the cause of two wars bewith India," Commerce Minis- tween India and Pakistan since ter Abdul Razzak Dawood told a independence from Britain in

ering" giving India the status of ready to enhance trade with Inmost favoured nation which dia despite New Delhi's refusal would remove obstacles to trade to import cotton from Pakistan

"If Pakistan's interests are between Pakistan and India. India gave Pakistan most served better by Indian imports favoured nation status in 1995 at good price, we have no objec-

S Americans gear up for

relaunching Mercosur

Chile's entry looks distant

which accounts for only 3 mil-

early to say when her country

per cent to about 30 per cent.

the issue of tariffs, it's true. But

there is a will to make progress

on these issues, so we think that

we want to progress gradually

towards Chile's becoming a full

member of Mercosur," she told

external tariff, it would be in

line with regional and interna-

tional trends to open up to

would be a very positive signal

has been one of the fastest-

growing in the world over the

cut import tariffs to 6 per cent

by 2003 from today's 10 per cent

to lower costs for industry and

last two decades. Chile plans to

markets, which we support, and

Chile's export-led economy

"If they reduced the common

reporters.

Picture shows the 8th meeting of the Board of Directors

of Islami Insurance Bangladesh Limited held at a city

Soledad Alvear said it was too Brazil

Trading between Pakistan Both countries lay claim to and India stands at about US\$ 50 million annually, while in-

formal trade or smuggling is worth more than dlrs 1 billion. On Wednesday, Pakistan announced a new trade policy Dawood said Islamabad is allowing import of machinery for the rice sector and several

leather products from India. Dawood said so far no formal talks have been opened In a bid to ease tensions. Pakistan's military ruler, Gen.

Argentine officials say in

Argentina is the richest

has traditionally gotten its way

Luiz Felipe Lampreia said it was

Chile, not Mercosur, that would

ing to join Chile. It's Chile

that's going to join Mercosur.

he told reporters at the ornate

San Martin Palace in Buenos

nando Henrique Cardoso was

tendency in the world is not to

raise tariffs. It is to lower them.

to end the meeting on Friday.

A presidential summit is due

By then, Brazilian and Ar-

gentine negotiators hope to

have convinced Uruguay to ac-

cept their plan to liberalise

trade in their key auto indus-

tries within Mercosur by 2006.

The big two have already man-

aged to get Paraguay to accept

the deal, which will make car

Earlier this year, Mercosur,

members agreed to work toward

establishing common limits for

debt and other indicators in

their historically volatile

economies in a bid to forge re-

gional harmonisation and ties

modelled on the European

Mercosur will announce a

'Social Charter" on Friday that

will outline nonbinding objec-

tives to improve the lives and

working conditions of its citi-

imports more expensive.

more conciliatory, saying: "The

But Brazil's President Fer-

have to bend.

Brazil's Foreign Minister

"It's not Mercosur that's go-

more eager to reduce tariffs

Pervez Musharraf has sought There was no immediate renewed talks with India over Kashmir, But India has refused demanding that Islamabad should first put an end to crossborder incursions by militants in its controlled Kashmir.

> Pakistan says it has no control over the militants, who have been waging a bloody secessionist movement for the last decade in Kashmir.

Kashmir, the only Muslimmajority state in Hindu-dominated India, is the main obstacle to better relations between the two countries.

Australian trade deficit widens on import surge

SYDNEY, June 30: A surge in imports in May saw a sharp widening of Australia's trade deficit today, contributing to a dip in the Australian dollar below 60 US cents, says Reuters.

But following on from a twoyear low for the trade gap in April, analysts were not overly concerned by the May outcome and said the trend was still for an improvement in Australia's external accounts.

Official figures showed the balance on goods and services trade was in deficit by A \$1.553 billion in May, above forecasts for a \$1.0 billion gap.

But forecasts had ranged widely from A \$650 million to A \$1.5 billion, because a large amount of imports that occurred in April were reported late in May. Some analysts had expected these imports to be included in a revised April figure but instead all of the increase came in May.

April's deficit was revised slightly to A\$572 million. Imports rose by a hefty 11 per cent in May, far outpacing a solid

two per cent increase in exports. Most of the increase in imports came in intermediate goods, which are inputs into the production process, rather than consumption goods.

"That increase is not necessarily a bad thing, since at least it's going into production." said National Australia Bank Senior Treasury economist Tony Perarson.

He noted the April figure was artificially low, and said averaging the two months together produced a monthly deficit of A\$1.1 billion.

better than it was in 1999, but we had thought," Perarson said. | not be delayed," said Samuel hue said. economist Glenn Maguire said

the strong import volume was a

positive sign.

"The trade position is still

US business presses tor China trade vote WASHINGTON, June 30: Big

expected in Millau to support Jose Bove.

business vesterday stepped up pressure on Senate Republican Leader Trent Lott to schedule a final vote in July on a landmark China trade bill, warning that foot-dragging could hurt US companies and prompt a backlash from corporate donors ahead of the November elections, says Reuters.

Legislation granting permanent normal trade relations (PNTR) to China was approved by the House of Representatives in May in a major victory for business groups, which spent millions of dollars in a lobby-

But Lott of Mississippi has yet to schedule a final Senate vote, insisting that lawmakers first complete work on key spending bills to fund the federal government and take up legislation to combat weapons proliferation by China.

In a joint statement, the US Chamber of Commerce, the National Association of Manufacturers, the Business Roundtable and the Information Technol-Lott against holding up the convention in August. trade bill any longer.

nomic reasons, but because it will set the stage for US -China SG Australia chief Maury, president of the Business Roundtable.

Bruce Josten, executive vice dent Bill Clinton, the legislapresident of the Chamber of tion would end the annual rit-

paign support ahead of the Nov. 7 presidential and congressional elections over Senate nearly every other nation. foot-dragging. But he told reporters, "The

French police forces stand in front of Millau's McDonald's Friday, prior to the opening of

the trial against leader of farmer movement Jose Bove and nine colleagues from the

Peasant Confederation, for the attack on the garrison of globalisation, the local

McDonald's, in August 1999. A crowd of 30,000 demonstrators against globalisation is

Foot-dragging seen hurting cos

cDonald's

entire business community will be and needs to be mindful of how it deploys its political contributions in an election year with an issue with such huge importance in front of the Sen-

There is little doubt over the outcome of the Senate vote once one is scheduled by Lott. Unlike the House, where two out of three Democrats voted against measure, the trade bill enjoys broad bipartisan support in the Senate. Sixty-three lawmakers in the 100-member Senate said in a Reuters poll they would vote in favour of PNTR, enough to override a vote-blocking fili-

Senate Democrats who support the trade bill have accused Lott of delaying the vote to maximise leverage on spending bills and to hurt presidential hopeful ogy Industry Council warned Al Gore before the Democratic

"If PNTR is lost because op-"PNTR is an essential na- ponents take advantage of tactional priority, not just for eco-tical disagreements among PNTR supporters, America will pay the consequences for relations in the decades to decades," Chamber of Comit's not improving as quickly as | come. It is important enough merce president Thomas Dono-

Once approved by the Senate and signed into law by Presi-

Commerce, stopped short of ual of reviewing Beijing's trade threatening to withhold cam- status and guarantee Chinese goods the same low-tariff access to US markets as products from

-AFP phto

Clinton moves to release \$20m for DPRK oil

WASHINGTON, June 30: President Bill Clinton took a routine step yesterday to release up to \$20 million in US funds to provide oil to North Korea as part of a deal to rein in Pyongyang's nuclear programme, the White House said, reports Reuters

Under the 1995 agreement, the United States, Japan and South Korea founded a group to supply North Korea with two light-water nuclear reactors and heavy fuel oil in exchange for Pyongyang's promise to freeze its nuclear development programme.

In order to release funds to · the effort, in which the United States provides the heavy fuel oil, the president must waive a requirement under US law that he certify that North Korea has terminated its nuclear weapons programme.

The president, who has regularly issued such waivers in the past, did so again vesterday in a presidential determination released by the White House that one US official described as a "routine paperwork exercise."

IBM supercomputer aims at beating human brain's computing skill!

announced it has built the most Energy Department's Lawrence powerful supercomputer in the Livermore National Laboratory world, able to perform 12.3 tril- this summer. lion operations per second. three times faster than the next-fastest computer, says AP.

An earlier version proved capable of defeating the world's greatest chess player in a 1997 tournament. The latest machine is intended to continue the advance toward matching and eventually surpassing the computing capacity of the hu-

The computer, called Advanced Strategic Computing Initiative White, or ASCI White. covers 9,920 square feet (921 sq. meters) of floor space and weighs 106 tons.

IBM, making the an-

WASHINGTON. June 30: IBM will deliver ASCI White to the

- Islami Ins photo

Under the ASCI contracts, the department pays a company — in this case, \$110 million — to build a computer that can simulate the testing of nuclear

In time, said IBM and Livermore officials, this computer could lead to the end of nuclear Last year, when the Senate

rejected a treaty to ban nuclear testing worldwide, the administration of US President Bill Clinton argued that using com-

puter simulation instead of actual nuclear explosions was a reliable way of appraising the nouncement Wednesday, said it American weapons stockpile.

To perform a full three-dimensional nuclear simulation in 1985; it would have taken the fastest supercomputer available 60,000 years, said David Schwoegler, spokesman for the lab. When a supercomputer reaches 100 trillion operations per second, the lab can do the same test in a month. They expect that to happen by 2004.

In creating ASCI White, IBM exceeded one of the most venerable axioms of computing, Moore's Law. The rule, offered by Intel founder Gordon Moore in the early days of electronic computing, maintains that computer power will double every 12 months to 18 months.

IBM officials said that the new system could contribute to breakthroughs in financial models, genetic computing and allow a country to monitor na-

tional air space with a single machine. The existing 18-hour computing cycles needed to create a global weather model could be reduced to seconds.

ASCI White has 8,192 microprocessors and is 1,000 times more powerful than "Deep Blue," which defeated chess grandmaster Garry Kasparov in

The human brain, it is estimated, computes about 1,000 times faster than ASCI White. which requires 1.2 megawatts of power, enough electricity to power 1,000 homes. At IBM's current rate, a su-

percomputer could exceed the brain's capacity in 10 years. Even now, it would take one person with a calculator 10 million years to do the same number of calculations ASCI White can do in one second.

Tibetans urge WB to scrap China project

WASHINGTON, June 30: Protesters from Tibet and elsewhere urged the World Bank vesterday to scrap a contested plan to resettle poor farmers in traditional Tibetan lands, praying and singing songs to draw attention to their cause,

A group of nearly 100 people, including 50 Tibetan refugees living in India, Nepal and European countries, gathered outside the bank's glass-and-steel headquarters. The Tibetans wore traditional costumes and waved a sign reading: "World Bank: Are you listening? Tibetans say: Cancel the project."

"We are not against the World Bank helping the poor, but not at the cost of a culture that has existed for more than 2.500 years," said Dorjee Jamayang, director of the Tibetan Institute of the Performing

"Today's protest is a visible sign that the bank has failed to listen to the Tibetan people. These people represent the true feelings of the Tibetans back home, who cannot express their true feelings."

China annexed Tibet in 1951 and rules it from Beijing. The World Bank's \$160 million loan, approved last year, would resettle 60,000 poor farmers. moving some of them to lands where Tibet's spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, was born.

A scathing independent report unveiled earlier this week said the bank failed to follow its own rules in assessing the potential social and environmental consequences of the project, including the impact on minority groups.

It said the bank did no make adequate efforts to consult the public.

okays \$23.2b deficit budget

land's lower house of parliaopposition politicians, reports

The 910 billion baht (\$23.2 billion) deficit budget cleared its first hurdle through the elected legislature with a lopsided 210 to two votes.

Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai's government had planned to have the budget bill vetted and reviewed by parliamentary committees in July and August before final debates in the lower house during the first week of

But the legislative process this year may be shortened after the resignation of dozens of members of parliament from the opposition New Aspiration Party (NAP) this week.

The NAP, which has 116 MPs and is led by former Prime Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, wants to force Chuan to call an election soon instead of waiting until the end

Chuan has vowed to get the new budget passed first before his Democrat Party decides on

Abhisit Vejjajiva, a minister sion during the first quarter attached to Chuan's office, said ended in March 1991, and the | would probably try to hasten sion on Aug 22 unless convincing United States now is in a period | the budget bill's legislative proof record unbroken growth that | cess to avoid any criticism that The Fed said it saw hints the Fed is seeking to sustain by it was trying to hold onto power

parliamentary opposition. Another opposition group, Policymakers on Wednesday | the 19-seat Social Action Party breaking economic expansion, month ago, the Commerce De- a separate report on Thursday said they were worried about (SAP), has said about half of its from Commerce that said sales tight labour markets - with members plan to follow the That was down from a siz- of single-family homes fell unemployment at its lowest level NAP's move and resign next

> sentatives, there will still be at least 40 opposition MPs in the

lower house. Political analysts say this would give Chuan the appear-

US economic boom fails to benefit workers

chairman Bill Gates would un- among full-time employees have that it is possible for anyone to "An increase of that size at report that raised questions That left the US central bank well the trained among full-time employees have that it is possible for anyone to "An increase of that size at report that raised questions That left the US central bank well the trained among full-time employees have that it is possible for anyone to "An increase of that size at report that raised questions are report that raised questions are report that raised questions are report to the trained among full-time employees have the raised questions are report that raised questions are report that raised questions are report to the trained among full-time employees have the raised questions are report to the raised questions. 1970s, a new study made public yesterday found, reports

Reuters. which examined poverty levels New York-based Conference Board found that since 1973, even as the workforce has expanded, a growing proportion of The combined company employees has been touched by poor," it said.

"Working full-time, yearomo, 24 per cent by Microsoft | round, even in a booming economy, is not enough to lift every-Barrington, the study's author up almost 50 per cent. The merger could yield an and a labour economist at the Conference Board, a private makes it more difficult to save, business research group.

The study was the first to compare poverty rates among nancial planning," the study The Financial Times noted full time workers going back to said. that cable television penetration | the mid-960s. Currently, the poverty line is \$13,290 for a beginning in March 1997, a

time workers are increasing

NEW YORK, June 30: really challenges that belief that million workers. That was about ington says: The US economy America's longest ever economic we hold," Barrington told the same increase as occurred shot ahead more quickly than expansion has failed to benefit Renters. She was referring to in 1981, a year of economic re- previously thought as 2000 beall workers as poverty levels the widespread American belief cession, the study found. changed little since the early rise out of poverty with hard

norities in the workforce have In groundbreaking research higher levels of poverty and lag behind whites in income, alamong full-time workers, the though they now make up more than 25 per cent of full-time workforce. "Today, a nonwhite full-time worker is one and a half times more likely to be

In addition, the two lowest paying sectors in the economy - retail and services - are now employing a greater share one out of poverty," said Linda of the total workforce, making

"Cycling in and out of poverty accumulate wealth, and carry out long-term personal and fi-Even in the one-year period

said in an interview. time when the economy was "If the numbers of poor full- booming, the number of poor workers grew by almost half a and the share of that popula- percentage point to 2.9 per cent tion is increasing. I think that of the workforce, or about 3

The study found that mi- will be more cause for concern if new government data to be released in September fail to broadest measure of total ecoshow a dramatic improvement.

> have entered the workforce in but also meant there were more eral Reserve policymakers con-

> economy. But "what does it mean if you're completely attached to the labour market and not get- elled by the strongest consumer ting your family out of poverty? Clearly this is something that

First quarter growth crosses forecast Another report from Wash-

gan, said a revised government felt inflation risks were high. Barrington, adding that there off more interest-rate rises this early as at its next policy ses-

Gross domestic product the signs of slowing appear. numbers overshadowed some during the first quarter instead "tentative and preliminary" at cent to 4 per cent a year. good news: During the record- of 5.4 per cent estimated a this stage. Another hint came in many more low-skilled workers partment said on Thursday.

zling 7.3 per cent rate of growth slightly by 0.2 per cent in May in three decades, employers week. That increased the level of in the final quarter of last year to a seasonally adjusted have difficulty hiring. poverty among full-time workers but well above levels that Fed- 875,000 a year. individuals with a stake in the sider are able to safely sustain to rising interest rates since for jobless benefits edged up by growth without risk of firing in-

First-quarter GDP was fu-

spending in 17 years and prices climbed at the fastest pace in should get the attention of those 5-1/2 years - both of which who work in public policy." she are likely to heighten Fed concern it may be difficult to slow demand enough to curb inflation.

Fed policymakers on Wednesday announced a pause in raising interest rates for now an end but it was unclear yet cent

after pushing them up six times how much of the bloom was since June last year. However, they warned they

both builders and buyers rely 2,000 last week to a still-low on borrowed money. Any slowing some layoffs in the auto indus-

into reduced spending on furniture, appliances and all the sale and occupancy.

The US economy completed a | the timing of the poll.

ninth full year of steady expanthis time is worrisome," said whether a slowdown will head poised to hike rates again as this year. The last recession on Friday the government nomic activity, expanded at an that demand-fuelled growth easing the pace of GDP advance without proper checks from a Barrington said the grim annual rate of 5.5 per cent might be easing but they were down to a rate nearer 3.5 per

going off new-home demand.

On Thursday, the Labour Housing is especially sensitive Department said initial claims 306,000, mainly because of in housing quickly translates try where sales have been level-

Bond prices took wing on the other furnishings that are fresh signs of modest cooling. needed to complete a house for Inflation-sensitive 10-year US Treasury notes climbed 16/32 Economist Joel Naroff of of a point to yield 6.04 per cent Naroff Economic Advisors Inc. and the 30-year Treasury bond in Holland, Pa. said the boom in soared 1-3/32 points as its housing demand was coming to vield eased down to 5.88 per

Thai lower house

BANGKOK, June 30: Thaiment passed the 2000/2001 (October-September) budget at its first reading yesterday night after a debate overshadowed by the resignation of more than 90

September.

of his term in mid-November.

But even after the resignation of the SAP and NAP repre-

ance of constitutional legitimacy and allow him to remain in office for a while longer. Finance Minister Tarrin Nimmanahaeminda warned on

Thursday that any delay to the budget bill could disrupt government efforts to revive the economy and erode market sentiment.